

[The Newton Family]

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John Newton Blair's family

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THE NEWTON FAMILY

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Situated on a little farm near Miami, Florida is the small cottage that is the home of Jack and Margaret Newton and their three small children, Joanne, eight years old, Betty five, and Jack junior, two.

The farm consists of about seven and a half acres of land, half of which is fairly productive muck, suitable for the growing of vegetables. Black-eyed peas, tomatoes, corn, squash and okra are the chief crops with a sprinkling of small patches of radishes, carrots, onions and other necessities for the family table. The balance of the land, which is mostly a sandy loam, is used for a few citrus trees, papaya plants and for the house, barn and pasturage.

The house is a four room frame bungalow, well built, but badly in need of repairs. The roof leaks in one or two places and a few of the side boards are somewhat warped. Inside the house, which I found to be kept neat and clean and the floor freshly scrubbed, are two bedrooms, a dining room and a small kitchen.

The furniture is a collection of odd pieces gathered here and there, a few of which are home-made from packing boxes and orange crates. There were a few scattered rugs on the floors and clean muslin curtains at the windows.

There is no electricity or running water, but upon sampling the pump water, I found it to be of excellent taste. They do have, however, a modern gasoline operated washing machine to do the family washing and a three burner kerosene stove to cook on.

The livestock consists of two cows, named "Bobbed-Tail" and "Goldie," about sixty-five chickens, twelve ducks, two white rabbits, two dogs of undetermined origin, and three cats, besides Joanne's two pet gophers which she keeps in a little pen so they cannot run away.

Joanne, the oldest, is a bright, blue-eyed little girl with golden brown hair. She is fond of all the animals and has even found names for most of the chickens. How she tells them apart so easily is a mystery to everyone.

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She has set out a dented garbage can cover on an old tree stump. This she always keeps full fresh, clean water and it makes quite a practical bird bath, much used by the birds. Joanne is especially fond of a small covey of quail which can be constantly heard calling about the place. They have become so tame that they will approach within fifteen feet of the house in search of food. Under no circumstances, will she allow anyone to shoot them, 3 in season or out.

Joanne attends school during the winter and seems to be getting along very well. She likes to meet other children with whom she has lots of fun when not too busy with her animals. She is proud of being "such a big girl" and spends much of her time in looking after and trying to mother her little brother and sister.

Betty, the next eldest, looks somewhat like Joanne but is very different in disposition. She is quiet and retiring and I was unable to get any response from her. She would just look at me and smile when I tried to talk to her, then ran off somewhere out of sight. Her mother said that she is always very bashful with strangers.

Little Jack, who is very mischievous, is just old enough to get into everything and every body's way. His special delight is to knock over Joanne's bird bath and then run as fast as he can to hide behind his mother's skirts. This is Joanne's chief worry in life and she has begged her Daddy to build a small fence around her bird bath. He smiles at her anxiety but he has promised to do as she asks at the first opportunity.

The morning that I visited the Newton farm, I found them all at home, except Jack. It was a rather chilly morning and Margaret, the mother, did not think that Joanne should go to school because of a slight cold. She thought the warm sunshine would be the best 4 remedy for the child's cold.

Margaret was getting everything ready to do the family washing and as I drove up she greeted me with her usual pleasant smile. I have known the family casually for some

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time. When I told her my mission, and asked her if she would cooperate with me in giving me a few details of her life, she smiled brightly and said., I've never thought much about the things I do in life. I guess I keep too busy, but I will be only too glad to give you any information that I can. I have always taken everything as it came along and just figured that we live about the same as other folks do around."

As she stood there by the washing machine, Margaret made a pleasing picture. She is a small, well built woman about 35 years of age, rather pretty. Her dark complexion, blue eyes and brownish colored hair are an unusual combination. She was dressed in a nest green cotton house dress but was bare footed. She told me later that the only time she wore shoes was when she knew that company was coming or on her weekly trips to town. She does not like to wear them then, she said, but must do so for convention sake. None of the children wore shoes except Joanne who only wore them when she went to school.

When asked how she occupied her time, Margaret said:

"Jack gets up at five o'clock every morning and feeds the chickens, ducks and other animals, then he milks the cows. I get 5 up at six o'clock to cook his breakfast and fix his lunch. By 6:30 Jack has finished with his chores and we eat breakfast, which usually consists of grits, eggs, biscuits and coffee. Sundays, we have pancakes and syrup or honey.

"By seven o'clock, Jack is ready to go to work. He works in a lumber yard about six miles from here and goes back and forth in a 1928 Ford sedan, — the same car that we came to Florida in, "she added. "After Jack leaves it is time to get the children dressed and feed and get Joanne off to school. Joanne takes a school bus that picks the children up along the way.

"Then I either wash my clothes or go to work in the garden, chopping a few weeds and picking some vegetables. I work this way every day until 12:30, when I must stop and fix some lunch for myself and the children. After lunch and in the heat of the day I just cannot

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work in the open so I tidy up my house and, if I have a little time to spare, I lie down for a little while and make the children do the same. At three o'clock I'm at the garden again for about an hour and then I must stop to feed the chickens and milk the cows. By that time, it is about five o'clock and Jack has come home from work so I must start preparing supper.

"After Jack gets home he works in the garden, picking and hoeing until dark, then we have our supper. You see we cannot waste any daylight hours. Jack also works all day Sunday in the field.

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This goes on without much change from day to day except that on Saturday night we bundle the children into the car and we all go into town to do our weekly shopping, after which we see a movie."

"We do not have very much in the way of ready cash," continued Margaret, "but I suppose we are a lot better off than lots of folks. We are all healthy and happy together so I guess we have just as nice a living as anyone. Although Jack only makes \$12.00 a week at the lumber company, we have managed to keep ourselves well and always have plenty of good substantial food to eat. Whatever we have left over in vegetables, we trade or sell to the neighbors or to the local store for something we need. We try to manage our farm so that we always have some kind of fresh vegetables at all times of the year. I preserve some and we always store up a supply of field corn to feed the cows and chickens when the grass is not so good.

"We hope to get us a few hogs next year so we can have our own fresh pork. About once a week, Jack will shoot a couple of rabbits and, of course, we have our chickens. We only eat the roosters and save all the hens for laying. Some day we hope to have a nice chicken farm here, but we will have to wait for awhile as we must do some repairs on the house. Jack hopes to start on that this coming Sunday. If we just had more time, we could

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do lots more but we can't afford to hire anybody and, of course, the children are too young to help."

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"We have been here ten years now and we own this farm, and do not owe anyone a penny. We came here from a little town in Illinois and have always been farm folks. This is the only place we have lived in Florida. Jack had a little saved up when we first got married and he owned his own farm. He sold his place and we decided to try out luck here. Since being here, we think that there is no other place in the world like it and we are contented and happy here. Of course, like everyone, we have our dreams and ambitions. We want to have running water, electricity and a new and bigger house and each week, regardless of what we would like to spend, we put a little something away toward it. It isn't much, but we are still young and strong and feel that someday we will have what we want. As it is, we have good land and good health, plenty of good wholesome food, a roof over our heads, and good children so I guess the Lord has not been so hard on us and we are thankful for all we have."

When I first asked Margaret about her political affiliations she did not seem inclined to reply but later she said that they were Republicans. However, for all purposes of registration and for anyone's general knowledge they are Democrats since they came South. Nevertheless, she thinks that the present administration has done a lot for the poor folks.

"Yes, I believe in religion and formerly belonged to the Baptist church but it seems like now that we never have time to go to church. I try to teach the children the fundamentals of our religion though, and maybe some day we'll get caught up with everything so we can begin going to church again."

"We are trying our best to have a good home for our children and want them all to have a good education and go to school and maybe, to college. Jack managed to graduate

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from high school but I was only able to finish grammar school. My folks were ailing and I was badly needed at home to help with the work, but I want my children to have a better chance."